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## CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### BOARD MAKES CHANGES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS, APPOINTS NEW LEADERSHIP AND APPROVES APPROACH FOR BUILDING SYSTEM TO ENSURE MAXIMUM ACCOUNTABILITY TO TAXPAYERS

**Orange, CA** – The California High-Speed Rail Authority Board of Directors heralded three major milestones today by releasing its Final Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), electing Fran Florez, the first Latina to serve as board chair and approving an implementation plan that maximizes private sector risk and public accountability.

“This first phase of the environmental review process illustrated that the high-speed train system will have fewer impacts, create more economic stimulus, and cost less than half as much to build than the alternative of building more highways and airports to meet California’s transportation demand,” said incoming chair, Fran Florez.

“The environmental review process has given the public the opportunity to help design the high-speed train system. This document is the culmination of environmental analysis, public comment and old-fashioned elbow grease to determine alignments and stations for this sorely needed project. What it boils down to is that we cannot continue to build highways to try to solve California’s transportation crises.

“Through the process we determined some changes needed to be made to respond to public concerns as well as to meet regulatory guidelines,” said Florez.

The staff, in consultation with the board, made three modifications to the program-level or system-wide environmental analysis: 1) instead of selecting a specific alignment, a wide corridor has been identified for further study between Burbank and Los Angeles Union Station; 2) adding the Central California Traction alignment option to the project-level analysis between Sacramento to Stockton; and 3) committing to work with local, state and federal agencies on additional planning studies between Fresno and Bakersfield to evaluate feasibility of including a Visalia access point.

“Both the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency support the preferred route that this planning process identified,” said Mehdi Morshed, executive director of the Authority. “Both agencies agree that the alignments selected are most likely to contain the option that would least damage the environmental.”

The program-level analysis will be used as the foundation for the next round of “project-level” environmental reviews. The project-level environmental study analyzes impacts, rights-of-way and other factors within individual corridors and alignments.

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The board also approved today an Implementation Plan, which outlines the structure and institutional organization to manage construction work. Different than traditional transportation projects, the Authority will seek maximum participation and risk sharing from the private sector to ensure the greatest accountability to taxpayers. The Implementation Plan calls for working with private companies to adapt existing high-speed train technology to meet California's needs.

"The implementation plan acts as a roadmap for the Authority's evolution from an oversight board to a small planning group," said Florez. "Upon securing funding to build the system, we will evolve into a construction management agency and, finally, after the train system is built, into a long-term manager of operations and assets."

During its annual board elections, the board named Fran Florez as its chair, making her the first woman to chair the Authority board and one of a handful of Latina leaders to chair a state board.

"I'm both honored and excited to lead the board at a time when the project is achieving such momentum," said Florez. "The historic precedent, bringing high-speed trains to California and bringing Americans the same type of travel opportunities that are enjoyed in Europe and Asia, is an important personal and professional goal for me."

An appointee of the Senate Rules Committee, Florez previously served as vice chair of the Authority and brings a Central Valley connection to the Board. She is active in both politics and the private sector, and currently is Mayor of Shafter, serving on its city council since 1996.

The release of the Program EIR/EIS culminates what may be the most comprehensive public planning process in California's history. The Authority received and reviewed over 2,000 public and government agency written comments, spent hundreds of hours on research, conducted informational meetings throughout the state, held public meeting and solicited input from city, county, state and federal officials to plan the system.

The Authority and its federal partner the Federal Railroad Administration will next submit this document to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to have it published in the Federal Register, and make the document available to the public – required steps for certification, which is expected this Fall.

Also noted at the meeting was a summary of immediate funding for the project. This year's State Budget includes \$1.7 million to complete the "next tier" program-level environmental analysis (EIR/EIS) for the Northern Mountain Crossing that will determine the best alignment between the Central Valley and Bay Area. An additional \$500,000 has been allocated to update the financing plan for the high-speed train system.